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INTRODUCTION.

[2] [22] In 1903 Sir Bampfylde Fuller, then Chief Commissioner of Assam, proposed, and the Government of India sanctioned, the preparation of a series of monographs on the more important tribes and castes of the Province, of which this volume is the first. They were to be undertaken by writers who had had special and intimate experience of the races to be described, the accounts of earlier observers being at the same time studied and incorporated; a uniform scheme of treatment was laid down which was to be adhered to in each monograph, and certain limits of size were prescribed.

[iv] Major Gurdon, the author of the following pages, who is also, as Superintendent of Ethnography in Assam, editor of the whole series, has enjoyed a long and close acquaintance with the Khasi race, whose institutions he has here undertaken to describe. Thoroughly familiar with their language, he has for three years been in charge as Deputy-Commissioner of the district where they dwell, continually moving among them, and visiting every part of the beautiful region which is called [vi] by their name. The administration of the Khasi and [vii] Jaintia Hills is an exceptionally interesting field of official responsibility. About half of the district, including the country around the capital, Shillong, is outside the limits of British India, consisting of a collection of small states in political relations, regulated by treaty, with the Government of India, which enjoy

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almost complete autonomy in the management of their local affairs. In the remainder, called the Jaintia Hills, which became British in 1835, it has been the wise policy of the Government to maintain the indigenous system of administration through officers named *dolois*, who preside over large areas of country with very little interference. All the British portion of the hills is what is called a "Scheduled District" under Acts XIV and XV of 1874, and legislation which may be inappropriate to the conditions of the people can be, and is, excluded from operation within it. In these circumstances the administration is carried on in a manner well calculated to win the confidence and attachment of the people, who have to bear few of the burdens which press upon the population elsewhere, and, with the peace and protection guaranteed by British rule, are able to develop their institutions upon indigenous lines. It is now more than forty years since any military operations have been necessary within the hills, and the advance of the district in prosperity and civilization during the last half-century has been very striking.

The first contact between the British and the inhabitants of the Khasi Hills followed upon the acquisition by the East India Company, in consequence of the grant of the *Diwáni* of Bengal in 1765, of the district of Sylhet. The Khasis were our neighbours on the north of that district, and to the north-east was the State of Jaintia,* ruled over by a chief of Khasi lineage, whose capital, Jaintiapur, was situated in the plain between the Surma river and the hills. Along this frontier the Khasis, though not averse from trade, and in possession of the quarries which furnished the chief

* The previous history of the Khasi State of Jaintia, so far as it can be traced, will be found related in Mr. E. A. Gait's *History of Assam* (1906), pp. 350-362.

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to his own matriarchal stock, and at his death his bones are deposited in the cromlech of his mother's kin. In Jowai he neither lives nor eats in his wife's house, but visits it only after dark (p. 76). In the veneration of ancestors, which is the foundation of the tribal piety, the primal ancestress (*Ka Iawbei*) and her brother are the only persons regarded. The flat memorial stones set up to perpetuate the memory of the dead are called after the woman who represents the clan (*mâw kyrkei*, p. 130), and the standing stones ranged behind them are dedicated to the male kinsmen on the mother's side.

In harmony with this scheme of ancestor worship, the other spirits to whom propitiation is offered are mainly female, though here male personages also figure (pp. 108—109). The powers of sickness and death are all female, and these are those most frequently worshipped (p. 107). The two protectors of the household are goddesses (p. 112), though with them is also revered the first father of the clan, *U Thâwlang*.

Priestesses assist at all sacrifices, and the male officiants are only their deputies (p. 121); in one important state, Khyrim, the High Priestess and actual head of the State is a woman who combines in her person sacerdotal and regal functions (p. 70).

The Khasi language, so far as known, is the only member of the Môn-Khmêr family which possesses a pronominal gender, distinguishing all nouns as masculine and feminine; and here also the feminine seems immensely preponderate (p. 206). The pronouns of the second (*nê*, *phê*) and third person (*ê*, *lê*) have separate forms for the sexes in the singular, but in the plural only one is used (*phî*, *lî*), and this is the plural form of the feminine singular.

It may perhaps be ascribed to the pre-eminence

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members of these clans do not apparently regard the animals or natural objects, from which they derive their names, as totems, inasmuch as they do not abstain from killing, eating or utilising them. The names of these objects are connected generally with some story, concerning the history of the clan, but there is no evidence to show that the clans-folk ever regarded the above animals or objects as their tribal totems. If the lists of the Khyrim and Cherra clans are examined, it will be seen what a large number bear the name of *Dkhar* or its abbreviation *Khar*. The word *dkhar* is that applied by a Khasi to an inhabitant of the plains. We come across names such as *Khar-mukhi*, *Khar sawali*, the first word being an abbreviation of *dkhar*, and *mukhi* being the common Bengali name which occurs in Chandra Mukhi, Surjya Mukhi, &c. Sawali (*shawali*) is the common Assamese word for a girl. The ancestresses of these tribes were plains women, carried off, no doubt, in the raids made by the Khasis over the border into Assam and Sylhet. The word *Jaap* in the list of tribes is a Synteng synonym of *kur* or *jaid*, and the War word *Shnop*, which will often be found in the names of the tribes of the twenty-five villages of the Khyrim State, is merely a corruption of *jaap* or *iaap*, the Synteng word for clan. Let us now see how the State or Khasi township was formed out of a collection of these clans, how these clans obtained political powers, how some clans became more powerful than others, and how a Khasi King or Siem is appointed.

STATE ORGANISATION.

We have studied in the preceding chapter the formation of the clan from the family, and how the former established villages. Let us now turn to the constitution of the Khasi State, which, it will be seen, has been formed, in more than one instance, by the voluntary association of villages, or groups of villages. The head of the Khasi State is the Siem or chief. A Khasi state is a limited monarchy, the Siem's powers being much circumscribed. According to custom, he can perform no act of any importance without first consulting and obtaining the approval of his durbar, upon which the state

mantrie sit. This durbar must not be confused with the electoral durbar which will be referred to later. It is an executive council over which the Siem presides, and also possesses judicial powers (for a description of a judicial durbar, see page 91 of the monograph). The form of summons to appear before this durbar used to be a knotted piece of string or cane, the number of knots denoting the degree of urgency of the summons, not a piece of pork, as one writer has said. Pork is a luxury which is not usually distributed gratis. The Siem manages the State business through his mantrie, although it is true that in some States the members of the Siem family have been allowed a considerable share of the State management. This latter arrangement is, however, a departure from the ordinary rule in the Siemships, and is regarded as unconstitutional. In some States there are village headmen, styled Sirdars, who settle cases, collect labour, and assess and receive for the chief the *pynsuk*, which may be literally translated as "gratification." In Nongstoin there is an official styled *Syngdor*, who is the superior of a number of village sirdars, and who acts as the Siem's deputy-governor. In the Khasi Hills there is no land revenue, nor are there any tithes or other imposts levied upon the cultivator's produce. The land, to a great extent, is the property of the different clans and villages, although in some instances there are estates owned by private persons. The chief is entitled to receive the income that arises from what are known as the *raj* or State lands only. All that the Siem usually receives from his people in the way of direct revenue is the State subscription, or *pynsuk*, mentioned above. Even this is supposed to be a voluntary contribution, and it is not demanded in some States. This tax is nominally a collection to meet the expenses of the State administration, but is really a means of increasing the chief's private income. The contribution varies in amount according to the means of the villagers. The Siem's principal source of income, however, in all the Khasi States is the toll (*khoreng*), which he takes from those who sell at the markets in his territory. As the Khasis are great traders these tolls are often at the larger markets fairly valuable. The chief raises no excise revenue, the manufacture of both fermented and distilled

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liquor being subject to no fiscal restrictions whatsoever. In a few States the Siems are commencing to levy registration fees, but the amounts are insignificant. Judicial fines are divided between the chief and the members of the durbar. In some States the Siems' incomes amount to a few hundreds a year only. Generally speaking, the Khasi chiefs are necessarily a very impecunious set of persons, and many of them are indebted to, comparatively speaking, large amounts. The Siem is appointed from the Siem family, there being such a family in each of the fifteen Khasi States. The most important States are Khyrim, Mylliem, Cherra, Nongstoin, and Nongkhlaw. There are a few other petty States presided over by Lyngdohs, Sirdars, or Wahadadars. A fact which is of universal application is, that heirship to the Siemship lies through the female side. The customary line of succession is uniform in all cases, except in Khyrim, save that in some instances cousins rank with brothers, or are preferred to grand-nephews, instead of being postponed to them. The difference between the rule of succession and the rule of inheritance to real property should be noted. In the former case the case of the eldest uterine sister inherits in order of priority of birth, although it is true that this rule has sometimes been disregarded. In cases of succession to realty, however, the inheritance goes to the youngest daughter of the deceased's mother, and after her to her youngest daughter. In successions to the Siemship, in the absence of male heirs from the eldest sister the succession passes, by what has been aptly described as the "knight's move," to the male children of the next eldest sister. In Khyrim the custom of succession is peculiar, there being a High Priestess, and heirship being limited to her male relatives. Generally speaking, it would appear that succession was originally controlled by a small electoral body constituted of the heads (*Lyngdohs*) of certain priestly clans, who, it is presumed, exercised their authority to reject candidates, when necessary, mainly on religious grounds. There has however, been a distinct tendency towards the broadening of the elective basis. In the large States of Khyrim the number of the electoral body has been greatly increased by the inclusion of the representative headmen of certain villages but not generally (Hunter).

certain dominant but non-priestly clans (*mantriw*). In other States the Council has been widened by the addition to it of village headmen (*rai-kurs*), or the chief superintendents (*basnars*) of the village markets, tolls from which constitute the chief item in the public receipts of these States. A further step towards the recognition of the public will in the nomination of a Siem has been the introduction of popular elections, at which all the adult males vote. Such popular elections were very greatly due to the views held by Colonel Bivar, who was Deputy-Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills from 1865 to 1877. These elections have been, in many States, an innovation which is hardly in accord with public sentiment, and in many cases the voters have done no more than confirm the selection of a special electoral body. It is, however, clear that the idea of popular elections is not one with which the people are unfamiliar, e.g. in Langrin State, where all the adult males customarily vote at an election of a Siem. Popular election has also been customary in the Nobosohpoh and Bhowal States, in cases where a special electoral body has been unable to agree upon a nomination, and also in Nongspung, if a Council of five *lyngdoh*s, which has in this State authority to declare who is the rightful heir, but not to disqualify him, cannot come to an unanimous decision. The Siems are appointed by an assembly, or *durbar*, which will be described later. The chiefs, having been thus chosen by the *durbar*, which is supposed by the people to be an institution of Divine origin, are styled, *ki Siem u Blei*, or Siems of God. In most States the Siem is the religious as well as the secular head, e.g. in the Cherra State, where the Siem is also *lyngdoh*. In Khyrim State the Siem has sacerdotal duties to perform, at different religious ceremonies, especially at the time of the annual Nongkrem dance. It is the custom for the Siem to consult the augurs with the entrails for the good of the State. The Siem in matters judicial acts as a judge, the whole body of the *durbar* being the jury. In olden days the Siem marched to war at the head of his army. It is not customary to recognize an heir-apparent, and the young men of the Siem family pursue the ordinary avocations of a Khasi, not comporting themselves in the least like scions of royalty. In quite

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693 recent years there have been instances of Siems having been summoned, like the Roman Cincinnatus, from quite humble positions, to undertake the duties of chief. We will now turn to
693 793 an examination of the systems in the different Siemships. In the Kyrim or Nongkrem State there is a spiritual head, i.e. a High Priestess, *Ka Siew Sad*, who is responsible for the due performance of the State religious ceremonies, although, as already stated, the Siem also performs some of these duties. The temporal power here is delegated by the High Priestess to a Siem, who is her son, or her nephew, or occasionally some more distant male descendant. It is the duty of an official
[695] called a *lyngdoh*, who is the official spokesman of the Siem's darbar, to propose a new Siem to the six *lyngdohs*, or priests, and to the heads of the twenty-four *mantri* clans. The latter then decide in darbar whether the proposed Siem should be appointed. In the event of their disapproving of the *lyngdoh's* nomination they proceed to elect another Siem. The High Priestess is appointed by the above electors, the order of succession to the post being as follows:—she is succeeded by her eldest surviving daughter; failing daughters, by the eldest daughter of her eldest daughter; failing daughters of her eldest daughter, by the eldest daughter of her second daughter, and so on. If there are no daughters or grand-daughters as above, she is succeeded by her eldest sister. In the absence of sisters, she is succeeded by the eldest daughter of her mother's eldest sister, and so on. In this State the tradition runs that the first High Priestess was Ka Pah Synrew, i.e. the flower-lured one. Ka Pah
[72] Synrew was a beautiful maiden who had at her abode a cave at Mawsi, near Nongkrem, whence she was enticed by a man of the Mylliem-ngap clan by means of a flower. She was taken by him to be his bride, and she became not only the first High Priestess, but also the mother of the Second Nongkrem.* In Nongkrem the electors may disqualify the first, or any, heir to the Siemship for sufficient reason according to the Khasi religion and custom, such as bad character, physical disability, change of religion, &c. If the
693 first heir be disqualified, the next in order must be appointed Siem, unless he be disqualified, and so on. In this State there

* For the story in detail see the Folk-lore section of the monograph.

are six divisions, each of which is known as a *raj*. In each 631
raj there is a *durbar*, to which are submitted for approval 631
the elections of the heads of the *mantri* class. These elec- 631
tions are subject to the approval of the Siem. The Siem, sitting 643
with the *durbar* of the *raj* concerned, may dismiss a *lyngdoh*, 644
lyngdoh, or *mantri*, for bad conduct, or on account of physical
disability, in which case another *lyngdoh*, *lyngdoh*, or *mantri*
would be appointed, as stated above. The Mylliem State 631
originally formed a portion of the Nongkrem State, but owing 643
to a quarrel between one of the Siems and his nephew there
was a partition. In this State the electors are the heads of five
mantri clans, eleven *sutnibors*, or heads of clans, and certain
lyngdohs and other heads of clans. A majority of the electors is
sufficient for the election of a Siem. A Siem is succeeded by
the eldest of his uterine brothers; failing such brothers, by the
eldest of his sisters' sons; failing such nephews, by the eldest
of the sons of his sisters' daughters; failing such grand-
nephews, by the eldest of the sons of his mother's sisters; and,
failing such first cousins, by the eldest of his male cousins on
the female side, other than first cousins, those nearest in degree
of relationship having prior claim. If there were no heirs
male, as above, he would be succeeded by the eldest of his
uterine sisters; in the absence of such sisters, by the eldest of
his sister's daughters; failing such sisters, by the eldest of the
daughters of his sisters' daughters; failing such grand-sisters,
by the eldest of the daughters of his mother's sisters; and
failing such first cousins, by the eldest of his female cousins on
the female side, other than first cousins, those nearest in degree
of relationship having prior claim. A female Siem would be
succeeded by her eldest son, and so on. As in the Khyrim
State, the first, or any other subsequent heir, may be dis-
qualified by the electors for sufficient reason. An elector is
succeeded by the eldest of his brothers; failing brothers, by the
eldest of the sons of his sisters, and so on. An elector can be
dismissed by the Siem, but only for good cause and with the
consent of his *durbar*.

In the Nongstoin State there is a tradition that the first 643
Siem originally came from Sirmang* Dympep. The name, 773

* Sirmang is the Garo name for the river Simsang.

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Sunlung Dhrapore, of the place at the foot of the Garo Hills in the Mymensing district, may be a corruption of the former. The Siems are supposed to be descended from a stag, possibly a relic of totemism in this family. In this State there is a large elected darbar consisting of 2 *mantris*, 21 *lyngdohs*, 25 *sirdars*, 1 *lyngdor*, and 1 *lasnar*. The *lyngdohs* are the heads of the priestly class, by whom they are chosen. The *sirdars* of villages are appointed by the Siem in conjunction with the adult males of the different villages. There are two *lyngdors* and two *lasnars* in the State, but one *lyngdor* and one *lasnar* only at present are members of the darbar which nominates the Siem. A *lyngdor* is the Siem's agent for the purpose of governing a collection of villages. He is appointed by the Siem with the consent of the adult males of the villages which he is to supervise. The Siem family of Nongkhlaw, a Khadsawphra, is believed to have been founded by a Synteng of the name of U Shaje, who left the Jowai hills with his sister, Ka Shaphling, because she had failed to obtain her share of the family property in Jaintia. This man is said to have purchased certain lands in Bardwar in Kamrup. Apparently he did not obtain possession of this estate, for he came up into the Khasi Hills, and finding there certain villages without a ruler he, at the wish of the *lyngdohs* of these villages, consolidated them into a state over which he ruled as a Siem. He was succeeded by his sister's son, U Syntiew, who further extended his territories until he obtained possession of other villages. U Syntiew is said to have delegated a portion of his powers to his two sisters, Ka Jem and Ka Singkai, who ruled at Sohiong and Nongkhlaw respectively. Succeeding rulers further extended the Nongkhlaw territory. In 1829, U Tirot Singh rebelled against the East India Company and carried on for four years a successful guerilla warfare. He was finally captured and was imprisoned for life by the British Government. According to the statement of Raja Kiar Singh, it would seem that formerly the heads of five clans had the right to appoint the Siem, i.e. the heads of 3 *lyngdoh* clans and of the Jaid Bynkhar and Mongpoh clans. In the Cherra State the electors are the male adults of the State, who are represented on the State darbar by the members of the 12 aristocratic clans, known as the Shadar Sardar darbar representative class.

4[i.e. The Nongkrem State ... Ed.]

as the *Maolee hor*, and certain representative elders. This State 643
is divided for electoral purposes into the following divisions:— 631

I. Cherra, or Sohra, consisting of 8 villages, inclusive of Cherra, which is the capital. These villages return the heads of the 12 tribes, as well as 5 elders, as their representatives on the electoral durbar.

II. The "five" villages, or 5 tribes. This division now consists of 17 villages, which return 5 representative elders.

III. The "twelve" villages, comprising now 38 villages, which return 12 representative elders.

IV. The "four" villages, comprising now 5 villages, which return 4 elders.

V. The "sixteen" villages, which return 6 representative elders.

VI. Three villages, which return 3 and 4 sirdars and 2 elders respectively.

In this State it is the custom for a Siem to cremate the body 643
of his predecessor. Unless he performs the cremation ceremony, 766
he is not considered to be Siem according to the Khasi religion. U Hajon Manik Siem failed to cremate the body of his predecessor, U Ram Singh, whose remains still repose in a wooden coffin which is kept in the house of the Siem family. The remains of Siems in this state are preserved by a peculiar process of embalming which will be found described elsewhere in this monograph. U Hajon Manik died not long ago, and his body also is awaiting cremation. U Ram Singh's remains, however, have been awaiting the funeral pyre for more than thirty years; but arrangements are being made by the present Siem U Bola Singh for the cremation ceremony. The cremation of Siems in the state is attended by a very great deal of expense, a large amount of money being spent on the feasting which then takes place. The Maharam State was ruled until 1875 by two Siems, 643
called, respectively, the "white" and the "black" Siems. In this State originally there were five *Lyngdohs* who appointed the Siems, but as in certain other States the number of the electors has been expanded by the inclusion of *mantris*, *sirdars*, and *lieuns*. The electors now number seventy-two persons. There is much the same state of things in the Mariaw Siemship as regards the electorate. In Rambrai, on a vacancy

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643 occurring in the Siemship, three *lyngdohs* and two *mantris* assemble and decide who is to be Siem. They then summon the sirdars of villages to meet them in *durbar* and obtain the approval of the latter to their nomination. If the sirdars do not approve, the combined *durbar* then decides who is to become Siem. In Nongspung there is a tradition that two sisters, Ka Jah and Ka Jem, came to the village of Nongspung, which was then ruled by two *lyngdohs*, and that the latter, having ascertained that the two sisters were of royal birth, married them. They then travelled to other villages and obtained the consent of the *lyngdohs* of these villages to the formation of all their villages into a State, of which Nongspung became the capital, and over which U Sngi Shaflong, the son of Ka Jem, was appointed Siem by the five principal *lyngdohs*. After some generations the lyngdoh of Mairang with his villages became subject to the Siem of Nongkhlaw, an event which finds mention in the annals of the Nongkhlaw State as the conquest of the territory of the "Black" Siem of Nongspung. Another lyngdoh was appointed in place of the one whose territory had been thus annexed.

643 In the Mawiong State the ancient custom was that six *basans* [643] appointed the Siem, subject to the approval of the people of the Siemship. In the Nobosohpoh State there are two Siem families, the "Black" and the "White," from either of which it has apparently been the custom for the people to select a Siem, as they wished. In Mawsynram the electors of the Siem are the heads of the four principal clans in the State. On a recent occasion, the electors being equally divided regarding the appointment of a Siem, it was necessary to appeal to the people of the State. In Langrin there are, as in Maharam and Nobosohpoh, two main branches of the Siem family, i.e. the [641] "Black" and the "White" Siems. Here there is no special electoral body; all the adults of the state have the right to vote at the election of a Siem. In Bhawal State Siems are appointed by the heads of eight clans whose decision is apparently final, provided that it is unanimous. In Malai-Sohmat a bare majority of the heads of six clans would be sufficient for the election of a Siem. Presumably both in Bhawal and Malai-Sohmat, if the electors were equally divided, there would be an appeal to the people.

an appeal to the people. Mention has been made above of States over which *lyngdohs* possess temporal as well as spiritual powers. The States of Sohiong, Mawphlang, and Lyniong may be quoted as examples. Here the *lyngdoh* is elected from the *lyngdoh* clan by all the adult males of the state. Some small States, such as Macdon and Pomsaangut, are presided over by Sirdars, a name which has probably been introduced during the British era of supremacy in these hills. The Sirdar is elected by the adult males of the State. In Mawiong there are a Sirdar, a *lyngdoh*, and a *doloi* who govern the State. These two latter officials are elected by the people as in the case of Sirdars. In the Shella Confederacy there are four officials who are styled *Wahadadars*, the name being probably a corruption of the Persian *'ahda-dar*.* These officials are elected for periods of three years each by the people.

The Jaintia Hills, which are British territory, are divided up into twenty doloiships, the doloi being an officer elected by the people, the Government reserving the right of approval or the reverse to the doloi's appointment. The doloia, under the rules for the administration of justice in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, as well as the Sirdars of the British villages in the Khasi Hills, possess certain judicial powers. They are assisted by officials known as *putors*, *basans*, and *sangots* in the performance of their duties. This administration, on the whole, works well, and its success shows the wisdom of the Government in having made use of the indigenous agency it found to hand when the Jaintia territory was annexed. In the Jaintia Hills there are also three Sirdarships, the office being filled by election as in the case of doloia.

In conclusion it should be stated that it has been attempted here to give but a brief *résumé* of the Khasi political system as it exists at the present time. The above account of the procedure at elections is based on existing usage. The procedure should not, however, be regarded as stereotyped, for it will no doubt be open to such revision as may on occasion be suggested by the legitimate evolution of tribal customs.

* Officer.

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the War country, it will be necessary to describe the land tenures and laws regarding land of each of these divisions separately. As land is always *jhoomed* by the Khasis and Lyengams from year to year, customs regarding land with these people are naturally very simple. Taking land in the high plateau of the Khasi Hills first:—The lands are classified under two main divisions, (*a*) public and (*b*) private lands. The following are the different descriptions of lands in the first division:—

Ka ri Raj, or *ka ri Hima*, which are Sirdar's, or Crown lands. These lands are intended for the support of the Hima family, they cannot be alienated. The Simas are, however, precluded by custom from levying a land tax on persons who cultivate such lands, the relation of landlord and tenant between the latter and their chiefs being unknown.

Ka ri Lyngdoh.—These lands are for the support of the Lyngdohs or priests of the State. In some Simaships, as in Mawiang Simaship, paddy is grown on these lands from which rice is obtained for the State pujas.

Ri shnong, or village lands.—These lands are set apart to provide a supply of firewood, thatching grass, &c., and are the property of the village. The inhabitants of other villages are not allowed to enjoy the produce of such lands. Such lands can be cultivated by ryots of the village, but the latter possess only occupancy rights, and cannot transfer them.

Ri law kyntang.—These are sacred groves, situated generally near the summit of hills, composed of oak and rhododendron trees, which are held sacred (*kyntang*), it being an offence, or *sang*, for *any* one to cut timber in the grove, except for cremation purposes. These groves are the property of the village.

(*b*.) Private Lands. These may be subdivided into *ri-kur* or lands which are the property of the clan; and *ri kynti*, family, or acquired landed property. In the Khasi Hills proper a very large proportion, certainly of the high lands, is the property of the clan; for instance, the high lands at Laitkor, which are the property of the Khar kunger and Kur kulang clans, whose ancestors the large memorial stones close to the Laitkor road commemorate, also the lands of the Thang khew clan, and many others.

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cess. The Khasi word for consulting the omens is *khaw*, and a diviner is called a *nongkhaw*. Another method of obtaining omens is by throwing two leaves into a pool of water or on a stone, the position of the leaves as they fall, either right side uppermost or upside down, signifying good or evil as the case may be; this is called *khaw-sla*.

SUPERSTITION.

The Khasi priest is usually called *Lyngdoh*, or *longdoh*; he is always appointed from the lyngdoh clan. The etymology of the word *lyngdoh* is said by certain lyngdohs of the Khyrim State to be *lang*=together and *doh*=fruit. A *lyngdoh*, or *longdoh*, is one who collects sacrificial victims, i.e. fruit for the purpose of sacrificing. It must be confessed, however, that this definition is doubtful, owing to the absence in the word *lyngdoh* of the prefix *ang* which in the case of the agent in Khasi. Besides *lyngdohs* there are persons called *sub-kni* or *sub-sla*, who may also be said to be priests. The Khasis, unlike the Hindus, have no *purohit* or priest to perform the family ceremonies. Such duties fall to the lot of the head of the family or clan, who performs them out generally through the agency of the *kni*, or maternal uncle. Old Khasis are frequently well versed in the details of sacrifices, and in the art of obtaining omens by examining the viscera of sacrificial victims. Apart from family and clan sacrifices, there are the sacrifices for the good of the state or community at large; it is these sacrifices that it is the duty of the *lyngdoh* to perform. He may be said to be the priest of the communal religion, although he has certain duties in connection with offences committed against the social law of marriage, and with regard to the casting out of evil spirits from houses which may be thought to be infested with them. The lyngdohs of the Khasis may be likened to the Roman *pontifices*. In the different Khasi States there is, as a rule, more than one *lyngdoh*; sometimes there is quite a number of such priests, as in Nongkrem where there is a *lyngdoh* for each *raj* or division of the state. There are a few Khasi States where the priest altogether takes the place of the Siem, and rules the community with the help of his elders in addition to perform-

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by the usual spiritual offices. The duties of *lyngdohs*, their methods of sacrificing, and the gods to whom they sacrifice, vary in the different hamships, but there is one point in which we find agreement everywhere, i.e. that the *lyngdoh* must be assisted at the time of performing sacrifices by a female priestess, called *ka sob-lâsi*, *ka sob-sla*, or simply *ka lyngdoh*. This female collects all the puja articles and places them ready to the *lyngdoh's* hand at the time of sacrifice. She merely acts as her deputy when sacrificing. The female *sob-lâsi* is without doubt a survival of the time when, under the matriarchate, the priestess was the agent for the performance of all religious ceremonies. Another such survival is the High Priestess of Nongkrem, who still has many religious duties to perform; not only so, but she is the actual head of the State in this township, although she delegates her temporal powers to one of her sons or nephews, who thus becomes Siem. A similar survival of the ancient matriarchal religious system is the *Nem sad*, or priestess, at Mawryngkneng, who, on the appointment of a new *Siem*, or chief, has to assist at certain sacrifices. Here we may compare Karl Pearson's remark, when dealing with matriarchal customs, that "according to the evidence of Roman historians, not only the augurs but the sacrificers among the early Teutons were women." The duties of the *lyngdohs*, as regards ceremonial worship, consist chiefly of sacrificing at times of epidemics of cholera, and such-like visitations of sickness (*vide* *infra* 106). In the Khyrim State there is a goddess of such repute, or division, of the state, to whom sacrifices are offered on such occasions. To the goddess are sacrificed a goat and hen, powdered rice (*u kpu*), and a gourd of fermented liquor; the leaves of the *diengi* swing, or Khasi oak, are also used at this ceremony. The *lyngdoh* is assisted by a priestess called *ka sob-sla*, who is his mother, or his sister, or niece, or some other maternal relation. It is the duty of the priestess to prepare all the sacrificial articles, and without her assistance the sacrifice cannot take place. Sacrifices are also performed by the *lyngdoh* to a *Lei Lyngdoh*, alias a *Syngkow*. This used to be the tutelary deity in times of war, but in less troublous times the Khasi *lyngdoh* sacrifices to him for success in tribal or State litigation. A pig and a goat, with the usual accessories, are sacrificed by the

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The above and other similar sacrifices to the gods of the State or division of the State may be said to be the communal religious duties of the *lyngdohs*. The duties of *lyngdohs* with reference to private persons may now be mentioned. When it is found that any two people have made an incestuous marriage, that is to say a marriage within the exogamous group of the kur, or clan, the parties at fault are taken before the *lyngdoh* by their clansmen, who request him to sacrifice in order to ward off the injurious effects of the sang or taboo, of such a connection from the kindred. On this occasion a pig is sacrificed to u'lei *lyngdoh* and a goat to *ka lei long soj*. The parties at fault are then reinstated. As mentioned in another place, the sin of incest affords of an explanation for the affliction (*kpoodom*). In the Khyrim State, it is said by the *lyngdohs* themselves, although not by the Siem or the ministers, that they are the pecuniary legatees of all the persons who die without leaving female heirs (*ley dut*). In other States such property passes to the Siem. The *lyngdoh* of Nongkrem can also take possession of the property of persons who have been found to harbour an evil spirit (*jingdoh*) in their houses. It appears that in such cases the house and furniture are burnt, as in the case of the Tirot superstition in the Jaintia Hills, the *lyngdoh*, however, taking possession of jewellery or anything else of value. The only practical service the *lyngdoh* renders in return is to build the afflicted person a new house; unless, indeed, we take into account the casting forth of the devil by the *lyngdoh*. Mr. Jenkins, of Shongpung, in the Jaintia Hills, writes: "Such is the belief of the people in the evil spirits, that they are completely under the influence of the priests and spend large sums of money in order to secure their favour. They live in constant dread lest by the least transgression or omission they should offend those avaricious men and so bring upon themselves the wrath of the demons." The influence of the *lyngdohs* over the people in the Jaintia Hills seems to be stronger than in the Khasi Hills. For instance, it came to my notice in Nalieng that crops cannot be cut until the *lyngdoh* has seen them, in other words, until the *lyngdoh* has claimed and obtained his share of the produce. In many places, however, in the Khasi Hills the *lyngdoh* is much dis-
-credited, no doubt, to the advance of Christianity
[illegible]

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a similar custom prevalent amongst the Khyrwangs. The Nongtangs, in the Jaintia Hills, keep dead bodies sometimes as long as a month, until the *pâtar* or ceremonial dance has been performed. Hence they are called *Nong-tang*, or "stinkers." Amongst the Lyngams the dead body is kept for sometimes three or four months, or up to the time when a bull can be procured for a feast to the villagers. This feast is an essential, and, cattle being scarce in the Lyngam country, there is often great delay in disposing of the body. Lyngam villages of eight o nine are not unfrequent. The Lyngams of Nongkhlaw bury the cremated bones of the deceased within the village, and in front of the house occupied by the deceased when alive, the bones being placed in a hole in the ground, over which is laid a stone, a bamboo mat being rolled over the stone. A bamboo fence three or four feet high is erected round the grave. Other Lyngams bury the uncalcined bones and ashes in a ground in the jungle near the burning-place. On their way home, the members of the clan of the deceased who have come from other villages to witness the funeral obsequies, put up a stone on the path in honour of the deceased, a turban being tied round the top of the stone. The Garos or Dkas, who live at the foot of the hills on the Kamrup border, and are called by the Assamese *Mare* (meat-men), erect memorial stones in honour of the deceased, the lower jaw-bones of sacrificial animals and other articles being hung on the stones. The stones are also swathed in cloths, and turbans are tied round the tops. The death-customs of the Lyngams, and, indeed, other customs also, are partly Khasi and partly Garo, it being difficult to say that the Lyngams are more Khasi than Garo, or more Garo than Khasi in this respect; their language, however, has been found by Dr. Grierson to be a corruption of Khasi. In Nongstoin, Mawlh. and Mariow villages, the inhabitants of which profess to be Khasis, the bones and ashes of the deceased are not collected and placed in repositories, as at Cherrapunji. At Mariow and Nongstoin a large wooden coffin is used, painted white, with ornamentations on the outside, and standing on four legs. This coffin is not burnt on the funeral pyre. In the family of the chiefs of Cherra, the body of a deceased Siem is subjected to the following process:—It is wrapped in a cloth

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and placed in a hollowed-out trunk of a tree, *ka shyrpoid*, 76.4
there being a small hole with a plug at the bottom of this 69.1
receptacle. Spirit is then poured into the *shyrpoid* until the 76.6
whole body is immersed, the liquor being allowed to stand for
three days. After the body has been thus steeped, the liquor is
allowed to run out, and the body is washed with warm water,
after which it is allowed to dry for a day. Then a quantity of
lime-juice is poured in, the latter being obtained from the fresh
fruit of the lime (*u sohjew*). The body is thus exposed to a
process of pickling, which continues until the whole is
thoroughly dry and becomes like that of a mummy. It is
then placed in a coffin, which is kept in the house of the Siem
family until it is time to perform the funeral obsequies. These
ceremonies entail a very large amount of expense, and it some-
times happens that they cannot be completed for some years
after the death of a Siem. The body of a deceased Siem accord-
ing to the Cherra custom should be burnt by his successor;
otherwise the latter is not Siem according to the Khasi religion.
The last Siem of Cherra, U Hajon Manik, did not perform the
funeral obsequies of his predecessor U Ram Singh, and it is
stated that many of his subjects did not regard him as Siem,
according to the Khasi religion, in consequence. There are at
the present time the corpses of two Siems of Cherra which have
been preserved in the manner described above, awaiting crema-
tion. The first Siem, U Ram Singh, died as far back as 1875,
and the second, U Hajon Manik, died in 1901.

Sir Joseph Hooker and other authorities have stated that the 84.5
bodies of deceased Siems of Cherra used to be embalmed in 76.4
honey, and an amusing story is told regarding the necessity of 69.3
exercising caution in purchasing honey from Cherra (honey
being plentiful in this neighbourhood), except in the comb, for
fear of honey which has been used for embalming purposes
being passed off on the unwary purchaser. But the members
of the Siem family and the old residents deny that honey is
used for this purpose nowadays, possibly in the interests of
the trade. It is, however, not unlikely that honey was so
utilized in days gone by, as it is a well-known agent for
embalming. The bodies of priests in Burmah are said to be
embalmed in honey, *vide* Yule's "Embassy to Ava."

to lack the moisture, the mark was not obliterated as before. So their work went on progressing every day until Ka Dingiei fell. Thus the world received light, and cultivation throve, and there was nothing more to stand in the way of the light of the sun and the moon. It was for that reason that the name of "U Lum Dingiei" was given to the hill. Nobody knows what became of the tree, for since the time it fell its species has died out and there is no seed of it (to be found) anywhere on the earth from which it can be grown.

Ka la kyllon ka Dingiei. Kumta ha ubei phêr ka pyrthei bad ea manbha ka thung ka wep ka sei ynda yndon ba shêr shuh ia ka ingi ia u bnâi. Namarkata ki ea ioh ban khot kyrtong ia uno u lâm "u Lâm Dingiei." Ia ka jinglong kano ka Dingiei yn don ha lip sa-ei nadiih katta ka pér hadiih mynta, namar nadiih ha la kyllon ka iapdiih* bad yn don synhêi ha kan pynmih haschasi ha ka pyrthei hadiih kano ka ingi.

Concerning the Origin of the Siems of Shillong.

The Siem of Shillong is a very great and powerful chief in the Khasi Hills. He is generally known throughout the Khasi Hills as the "god king." By the term "god king" is meant that God has been pleased to give over to him the largest portion of the Khasi country, i.e. the kingdom of Shillong, to rule. If you seek for the origin of these "god kings," you will find there is great uncertainty about it. At any rate there is a tradition amongst the Khasis to the following effect. In olden days a rumour got abroad that there was a woman in a cave called Marsi, which is situated near the present village of Pomlakrai, at the source of the river Umiew or Umiam. She was a young and very

Shaphang ka long U Siem Shillong.

U Siem Shillong u long uvei u Siem uba khrew shibún had uba don bér ruh ha kano ka ri lúm Khasi. Ia uno u Siem la jiw hna bazoh kawei ka ri ha u long u Siem-Blei. Haba ong Siem-Blei ka mat ha U Blei u la i mon ongwbha ba'n aiti ha u ban synshár ia kawei ka bynta kaba khrew ha ri Khasi. Ha uno la ái ba'n synshar ha ri Shillong. Haba wáil ia ka jingsdang jong kine ki Siem Blei don shibún ka jingh'yn thikna. La kumno-kumno ka don ka jingiathu-khana kum kano kaba harum ha pydeng ki Khasi hadiih sano ka ingi. Ha kaba nyngkong eh la byna ba don kawei ka briew ha ka krem Marsi, kaba lajan ka shnong Pomlakrái mynta, ha tyllong ka wah Umiew ne Umiam. Kata ka briew kaba

* Iapdiit is the regular word used for a clan, and in this case a species dying out.

/ASP/ The Nongkrem Puja in the Khasi Mountains (Assam) (1)

726 1. All the pictures attached to this article are prepared from photographs taken by P. Prosperine Dargnolles, O.D.S., missionary in Shillong. The photographs were in part very difficult to take as they had to be made without being observed and in some cases the day was already well advanced.

by P. Dr. C. Jacobs, O.D.S., Apostolic Prefect of Assam.

631 About five English miles to the east of Shillong, the chief town of the Khasi Mountains, lies the town of Nongkrem. It is the seat of the king (u Siem) who governs the state Nongkrem of Khynim, the largest of the 25 Khasi little states and which is partly independent (semi-independent) of the English government. Nongkrem is best known for the great sacrifice, simply called Nongkrem Puja or also Pom Niang-u-U'lum Nongkrem (Slaying the goat of the S'iem of Nongkrem) which takes place there annually. This ceremony offers, as little else does, an instructive insight into the religious and social views and customs of this interesting mountain people and should therefore be given a concise description, which may be divided into three parts:

I. The Preparations for the Sacrificial Feast,

II. The Sacrificial Feast,

III. The Celebration that Follows.

I. The Preparations for the Sacrificial Feast

793 643 Just as matriarchy prevails in the family among the Khasi so a similar arrangement has been kept in the management of the Khasi state, Nongkrem. In the state the S'iem is not the actual head but a high priestess, called Ka S'iem Kñi. Kñi means the divinity which watches over the royal race. The temporal government is transferred by the S'iem Kñi to the S'iem, he acts as her authorized agent although independent in his decisions working with his advisers, whose advice he must obtain in matters of importance. The princes of the kingdom

divided equally. U Suba Bai explained that each house counted as a separate unit. Thus if Ka Jem, Ka Jin and all their daughters were alive, the married daughters who lived in a separate house, namely, Ka Laimon, Ka Laiben, Ka Simon and Ka Shisana of Ka Jem's house, and Ka Phes of Ka Jin's line, would each get a share. But Ka Jem and her Ka Khadduh Ka Aiban who lives in the mother's house would get only one share. So would Ka Jin, Ka Kirshan and the unmarried daughters of the latter. The descendants of Ka Lang would get seven equal shares for distribution to each house, and not two shares first, divided later into shares corresponding to the number of daughters for Ka Jem's and Ka Jin's house. The manager does not get any share of the collections. Authority in the management of the ancestral property therefore passes from one male to another, in the extended family, and the Kur, in a manner which necessitates a clear distinction of seniority and juniority of brothers, among themselves and also of sisters with regard to brothers.

The case of succession is similar. Gurdon notes that the Siemship in Mylliem State passes from a man to his next brother, and "failing such brothers, by the eldest of his sisters' sons; failing such nephews by the eldest of the sons of his sisters' daughters; failing such grand nephews by the eldest of the sons of his mother's sisters" and so forth in the female line. In Nongkrem, the son or similar male relative of the High Priestess becomes by delegation a Siem. The office of the High Priestess passes from a woman to her eldest surviving daughter; and failing daughters to the eldest daughter of her eldest daughter; failing daughters of her eldest daughter, to the eldest daughter of her second daughter, and so on. This is the customary line of succession, and is stated by Gurdon to be "uniform in all cases" practically.

Neither levirate, nor sororate are practised by the Khasis. Widows are stated (G) quite often not to remarry if there are daughters. There is no question of the control of the property